

Caldwell's Deacons Strive For Further Improvement

By ADAM SCHAEFER
Staff Writer

There is a certain excitement surrounding the Wake Forest football team this fall.

But wait a minute. Is this the same Demon Deacon team that went 5-6 and tied for sixth place in the ACC in 1997? Well, yes and no.

Sure, the Deacs return 16 starters. But there is no confusing last year's team and the one that takes the field against Air Force on Saturday.

The 1998 edition is talking about a trip to the Sunshine Classic (formerly the Carquest Bowl) or even the Peach Bowl. The 1997 club suffered a 51-point bloodletting in Tallahassee against Florida State.

But coach Jim Caldwell said Wake players worked hard and improved in the off-season.

"We have obviously made some major strides in developing our team speed and strength," Caldwell said. "But we must focus on getting even better in both of those areas."

Several signs indicate that the optimism might be justified.

First, the Deacs play a favorable schedule. Their other out-of-conference battles include Navy and Appalachian State. Plus, FSU, North Carolina and Virginia all must pay visits to Groves Stadium.

The Deacs also have what is probably the ACC's premier passing-receiving combination. Preseason ACC Player of the Year Brian Kuklick threw for 2,180 yards last fall, along with 15 touchdowns before being sidelined for the last two games with an injury.

Kuklick's favorite target was senior



Senior wide receiver Desmond Clark has caught 157 passes for 1,968 yards and 12 TDs in his career.



Wake Forest

1997 record: 5-6 (3-5 in ACC)
Head Coach: Jim Caldwell (14-41 overall, 14-41 at Wake Forest)

Home Field: Groves Stadium (31,500)

Returning Starters: 8 offense, 8 defense

Key Returnees: WR Desmond Clark, T Jeff Flowe, RB Morgan Kane, QB Brian Kuklick, LB Kelvin Moses

Key Losses: DE Robert Fatzinger, C Chris Gaskell, CB D'Angelo Solomon, LB David Zadel

Strengths: The Deacs return 16 starters after a surprising 1997 season. Kuklick is an ACC Player-of-the-Year candidate.

Weaknesses: Dealing with raised expectations will be a new experience for a team that has not had much success in recent years.

Keys to season: Kuklick, who was injured at the end of last season, must continue to improve. Clark and Kane need to provide him with some help. Kelvin Moses and Dustin Lyman have to lead Wake's defense from their linebacker positions.

Key Game: Nov. 7 at N.C. State



Jim Caldwell

Desmond Clark, who needs only 37 catches to become the ACC's all-time leader — a mark he'll probably reach by Halloween.

Despite that explosive combination, Wake's strength just might be its defense. The Deacs gave up just 96 yards rushing per game last year, 10th best in Div. I-A and eight starters return for Caldwell.

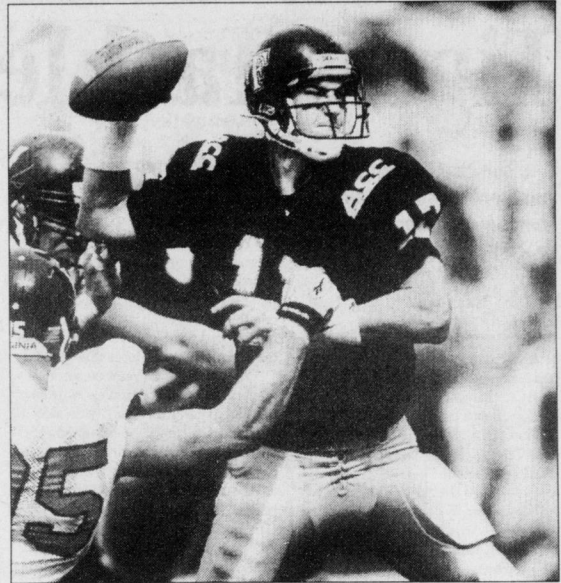
"Last year was our best team to date, and this team has the potential to be

even better," Caldwell said. "We were one game away from being bowl-eligible in 1997. ...That is our goal: to take that next step."

That next step starts Saturday in Colorado Springs against the option-happy Falcons.

The Deacs must get off to a good start early, because they finish up the season with UNC, UVa. and FSU and road

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Wake Forest quarterback Brian Kuklick threw for 2,180 yards last year.

Wake Forest '98 Schedule

Sept. 5	at Air Force
Sept. 10	Navy
Sept. 26	at Clemson
Oct. 3	App. State
Oct. 10	Duke
Oct. 17	at Maryland
Oct. 24	UNC
Oct. 31	Virginia
Nov. 7	at N.C. State
Nov. 14	Florida State
Nov. 21	at Georgia Tech

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